

OBITUARY

JOHN F. GATES CLARKE (1905-1990)

John F. Gates Clarke (1905-1990), 'Jack' to nearly every one who knew him, died on 17 September 1990 of complications following a stroke earlier in the year. He was President of the Lepidopterists' Society in 1972-73. He is survived by his wife, Nancy duPre Clarke; a son, John F. Gates Clarke Jr.; a daughter, Carol Clarke Lewis; five grandchildren; and one greatgrandson. His wife of 59 years, Thelma M. Clarke died in 1988.

Jack was born in Victoria, British Columbia, and moved to Bellingham, Washington when he was 11. He became interested in natural history at an early age and soon focused on Lepidoptera and then more specifically on microlepidoptera. He collected avidly in the surrounding area as a youngster and gradually expanded his collecting sphere with the passage of time. He attended Washington State College (now University) at Pullman where he earned a bachelor's degree in zoology and pharmaceutical chemistry and a master's degree in entomology and pharmacology. He taught biology at Washington State College from 1931 to 1935. He worked in a drugstore as a helper, then as a pharmacist, nights and weekends during high school, college, and while he was an instructor. Subsequently, he matriculated at Cornell University but did not complete a full semester. In 1935 he moved to Washington, D.C. where he accepted a position, which became available when Foster H. Benjamin died, with the Systematic Entomology Laboratory, U.S. Department of Agriculture. He worked first on noctuids, then on micros. During World War II he served in Europe in the Quartermaster Corps and was discharged with the rank of captain. Shortly after the war he was assigned to work at the British Museum (N.H.) on the Meyrick types of microlepidoptera. During these two years he completed requirements for the Ph.D. degree, which was awarded by the University of London. The results of his research became the monumental eight volume *Catalogue of the Type Specimens of Microlepidoptera in the British Museum (Natural History) Described by Edward Meyrick*, for which he received the Society's Karl Jordan Medal in 1979. He transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in 1954 as curator of insects and was the first chair of the new Department of Entomology from 1963 to 1965. He retired in 1975, and for a few weeks took a vacation and came to the office irregularly; but within two months, he returned to his regular work schedule of 6:00 am to 3:30/4:00 pm, five days a week. He worked in this fashion until a heart attack slowed his pace in April 1989. He remained in good spirits and continued to conduct research, curate the collection, and make progress on cleaning his office; a stroke left him disabled in June 1990.

Jack's publications reflect his interests and field work. The fauna of the Pacific Northwest was an early focal point, followed by a taxonomic revision of the North American Oecophoridae; illustration and taxonomic assignment of 5000+ Meyrick species; hosts and life histories of northwestern *Agonopterix* and *Depressaria*; Oecophoridae and Tortricidae of the Neotropics; and study of island faunas, particularly the Antilles and the South Pacific. Throughout, he published on individual species and other small projects, usually to solve taxonomic problems for others. During his later years he made four trips to the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, and was beginning to work up this material. *Xanthorhoe clarkeata* Ferguson (Geometridae), collected on one of these trips was named for him. His last written paper, recently published in this *Journal*, described a new species of *Mompha* (Momphidae) discovered on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

In 111 scientific and popular publications on moths he described 2 new families, 71 new genera, 547 new species, and 10 new subspecies. Five publications on pottery resulted from a long-term interest in 'Rebekah-at-the-Well' teapots.

Foreign travel was infrequent for a field biologist during the early phase of his career. However, after WW II he conducted field work in several South American countries, 30 Antillean islands, 33 Pacific islands, and many sites in North America. In later years he concentrated on collecting and curating butterflies while preparing and studying specimens collected on earlier trips. He appreciated warm weather and undoubtedly designed much field work with this in mind. His first wife, Thelma, accompanied and assisted him

on extended field work in the South Pacific. Nancy Clarke, an enthusiastic field worker, ably assisted Jack on several field trips.

Jack was preeminently pro-Smithsonian and National Insect Collection. He actively pursued high quality collections with the paramount objective to have them become part of the National Collection, and he made every effort to ensure that all staff actively participated in such activity. Even though space and drawers never seemed adequate, his philosophy was "We can always stack drawers on the floor," and "We have always found room for new material; the important object is to get it." He used to point with pride, tempered with a tinge of sadness that Busck could not see them, to the 2180 drawers of microlepidoptera contrasted with the four schmitt boxes that Busck found when he arrived at the Museum in the late 1800's.

Organization, attention to detail, and good work habits enabled Jack to accomplish as much as he did. Once he indicated that he never had had benefit of technical assistance during this entire working career. He made innumerable genital and wing preparations, mounted and spread several thousand specimens, and curated many drawers of moths in addition to conducting research. He allotted a specific amount of time each day to each activity and made progress in each area; however, exceptions to the schedule were made for visitors.

Through the years Jack was extremely helpful to a great many of the individuals who sought his advice, particularly younger workers. He always responded to interest on an individual's part with encouragement. He identified many specimens, especially of New World species, for a worldwide array of colleagues and workers.

Beyond entomology he was extremely interested in postage stamps, particularly of the United States. He amassed a valuable collection and sold it in the 1950's. Immediately, he began work on another that emphasized plate blocks. The extraneous stamps were sold from Clarke's stamp box. He maintained a wide selection of stamps in many denominations that people throughout the Museum of Natural History could buy and thus be saved a trip to the post office.

He was very active in two social/professional organizations, the Cosmos Club and the Washington Biologists Field Club. For several years he, Karl Krombein, and Paul Hurd had lunch at the Cosmos Club each Friday. He became a member of the Field Club in 1958 and regularly participated in its functions, particularly the spring and fall work days and field days.

He was an enthusiastic gardener; however, he had one criterion for selection of materials: the plant should require no care during the middle of summer when he might be collecting. He had a small rock garden, a wide array of iris and chrysanthemums, and spring bulbs. Each year he would bring lots of daffodils and chrysanthemums to the office for others to enjoy. Periodically, many were beneficiaries of his lifting and dividing bulbs or rhizomes.

When Jack turned 80, his friends and colleagues gave him a surprise party. Because he had always declined any party in his honor, particular attention was paid to this detail. The pretext came as a carefully made, formal invitation (in an edition of two) to a non-existent museum function. The event was highly successful, so much so, that he proposed and held his own party on reaching 85. Another small event 'happened' when Jack celebrated 50 years of work and association with the Smithsonian. Under the guise of discussing a problem in the hall, the lepidopterists entered his room and then presented him with a bottle of wine for the occasion.

He received an Alumni Achievement award from Washington State University in 1983 and a Special Recognition award from the National Museum of Natural History in 1985. Also in 1985 he was elected to Honorary Life Membership in the Lepidopterists' Society.

Jack Clarke had an infectious enthusiasm for insects, all aspects of his work, and life in general. He served as a role model for many. With his death the lepidopterists at the National Museum of Natural History have lost their remaining link with an earlier generation of workers—Busck, Heinrich, and Schaus—and one who was highly concerned about systematic entomology at the national level. His activities have touched a wide circle of friends and associates. Each of us has lost something valuable by his passing.

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